

# Case Study: U.S. Marine Corps' MarineNet

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## Research & Evaluation Team

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## Introduction

As part of their mission, the U.S. Marine Corps' College of Continuing Education (CCE) oversees all of the USMC's distance learning programs and products. This includes managing the development and deployment of all Web-based content on MarineNet—an online learning management system that provides Marines with anytime access to online training and education.

Since the launch of the re-tooled and fully SCORM compliant MarineNet 4.0 in 2004, the number of CCE courses available on MarineNet has grown. Currently, MarineNet includes more than 230 custom built USMC courses, more than 100 sister service and joint courses, as well as more than 2,000 commercial off-the-shelf courses. In FY09, MarineNet recorded more than 800,000 course completions (MarineNet, 2009).

## Benefits from Moving to Online Instruction

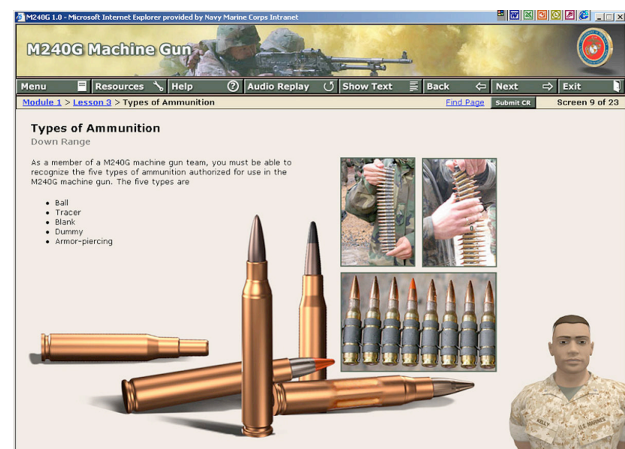
In moving to online instruction, the Marine Corps expected to achieve time and cost savings by reducing travel time to schoolhouses and customizing instruction so trainees could skim through known material and focus on less familiar material (Weber & Whitneck, 1999). However, since the launch of MarineNet, the Marine Corps has realized several other benefits from online instruction. The following paragraphs highlight two examples of how the Marine Corps is benefitting from online training.

**Increasing accessibility**—At the start of Operation Iraqi Freedom, Marines in non-infantry units (e.g., logistics specialists, air mechanics, and consular security guards) needed to attain basic proficiency in medium weight crew weaponry. Previously, these units' assigned infantry officer provided the training, since the School of Infantry does not have the capacity to train every incidental operator. However, given the need for standardized instruction, the Marine Corps turned to online learning to increase accessibility and support readiness. In 2004, MarineNet launched a seven-hour online, interactive course to train user on M240G machine gun operational characteristics, disassembly and assembly, maintenance, and inspection.

Using online instruction, the Marine Corps provides the foundation for subsequent practice in the Indoor

Simulated Marksmanship Trainer. To pass the online course, trainees must successfully complete a proctored exam. As noted by one senior instructor for the Infantry Machine Gun Leaders Course, having Marines complete the M240G machine gun interactive course better prepares Marines for combat and makes ranges safer. "Having the ability to verify a baseline of training prior to arriving at the range for live-fire exercises will make the ranges safely and efficiently run. It will also reduce the amount of instructor man-hours required to teach Marines the ins and outs of the M240G" (Bohanner, 2005a, p. 1).

The instructor also noted that the online machine gun course increases readiness by preparing incidental operators for combat by providing training that they may not otherwise receive in a timely manner. Additionally, providing the initial instruction on MarineNet frees time on the range for instructors to focus on practical applications and hands-on equipment use (Bohanner, 2005a). In FY09, more than 512 Marines completed the M240G online course.



**Promotion points**—Enlisted Marines can earn points toward promotion to ranks E4 and E5 by enrolling in optional self-education courses. However, the military's increased operations tempo makes it challenging for Marines to find the time to attend these training courses (Bohanner, 2005b). To meet this challenge, the Marine Corps is leveraging the accessibility of

MarineNet and currently offers more than 100 courses that Marines can take for self-education points anytime and anywhere—with an additional 12 courses under development. These courses cover a variety of topics ranging from managing budgets to terrorism awareness.

Marines receive 15 self-education points for each course that they successfully complete, up to a maximum of 100 points a year. These points count towards the proficiency component of their promotion score. As past research has linked promotion with retention (Carson, Carson, Griffith, & Steel, 1994), making these courses available online likely increases retention, which is particularly important given the current operations tempo.

Since the addition of these courses to MarineNet in 2005, Marines have taken advantage of the accessibility afforded by online learning. After mandatory training and certification courses, the self-education courses have some of the highest enrollments on MarineNet.

## Summary

Since its launch, MarineNet has experienced continued growth in the number of online courses available and the number of courses completed. Currently, the Marine Corps' delivers 70% of its pre-deployment training (PDT) via MarineNet. In addition to the anticipated benefits of decreased travel costs and decreased time to train, the Marine Corps is also benefitting from the increased accessibility afforded by online training. As highlighted in this case study, making the M240G course available on MarineNet has facilitated readiness by providing Marines with standardized instruction in a timely and cost-effective manner. Additionally, placing courses that can be completed anytime and anywhere on MarineNet for promotion points has motivated Marines to complete voluntary self-education courses.

## References

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